

January 8, 2004

SUBJECT: Performance Cycle Ending March 31, 2004

TO: Administrator's Council
Area Administrative Officers
AFM Division Directors
Area Personnel Assistants

FROM: Theresa Bailey
Performance and Awards Staff, HRD

This memo describes the procedures to be used for finalizing performance appraisals for one grade interval positions whose performance cycle began April 1, 2003 and ends March 31, 2004. This memo applies to all one grade interval positions, including clerical and administrative support, wage-grade, and technician positions.

Completion of Performance Appraisal Forms (AD-435P)

Performance Appraisal forms (AD-435P) for this cycle will be completed using an electronic AD-435P form. The form to be used is a Word Perfect form and is located on the Human Resources Division (HRD) Home Page at the following address: www.afm.ars.usda.gov/divisions/hrd/hrdhomepage/wpforms.htm. Employee listings for each organization will be sent electronically to each Area and AFM Division Office. These listings will identify those employees who require ratings this cycle and will provide the employee information necessary to complete the upper section of each AD-435P. The listings will need to be saved in Word Perfect before printing. If you experience problems printing the reports, please call me and I will send you a hard copy.

The AD-435P form will need to be downloaded from the website and saved as either a Word Perfect or Word document. An AD-435P form will need to be prepared for each person being rated. The employee listing should be used as a guide for completing the upper portion of each employee appraisal. The numbers next to the headings on the employee listing correspond to the blocks on the blank AD-435P that need to be completed. Once the form is completed and printed, each individual AD-435P should be saved to disk and retained for use for future performance cycles. Since the disk will contain sensitive information, please keep the disk in a secure place and/or password protect the documents on disk or in your system, when saving.

After the rating and reviewing official have signed the AD-435P, the performance discussion has taken place, and the employee has signed their AD-435P, a copy of the form should be made for the employee and a copy should be retained in the supervisor's records. Required documentation to be sent to HRD is discussed later in this memo.

Employees who have been in their positions and under performance standards for 90 calendar days or more are ratable and must receive an appraisal using the AD-435P. If an employee has not been covered under standards for the minimum appraisal period of 90 calendar days, the appraisal period for that employee should be extended to meet the 90 day requirement, at which time the employee may receive a rating of record. For questions about unusual circumstances, please contact this office for guidance.

Please remember that the rating supervisor should discuss the rating with the reviewing official **before** discussing it with the employee, and that the rating supervisor and the reviewing official cannot be the same person.

Also remember that an employee's signature on the AD-435P only constitutes receipt of the appraisal. An employee's signature on the form does not mean the employee agrees with the rating given.

In order to effectively assist an employee who receives a "less than fully successful" summary rating within established time frames, supervisors should contact their servicing Employee Relations Specialist immediately upon making that determination.

A written narrative justification providing details concerning the employee's performance must accompany the AD-435P to HRD if:

- 1) Any one element is rated "Does Not Meet Fully Successful" or,
- 2) The rating of record is "Outstanding."

Narrative justifications may be documented on the Performance Appraisal Worksheets (Forms AD-435A and 435B), or described on a separate memo. If the rating of record is "Outstanding," an employee accomplishment report will suffice as written justification, if available. Note: Not all organizations require that employees prepare annual accomplishment reports.

Completion of Award Forms (AD-287-2)

A "Recommendation and Approval of Awards" (Form AD-287-2) must be prepared for each award nomination. Employees rated "Fully Successful" or above are eligible for performance awards.

- Awards that exceed \$500 must be accompanied by a written justification. If the summary rating for the employee is "Outstanding," a copy of the justification provided for that rating will be sufficient for this purpose; if the summary rating is less than "Outstanding," a separate justification will need to be prepared or the employee's accomplishment report will need to be provided.
- Awards of \$500 or less, require no written justification.
- A Quality Step Increase (QSI) may be recommended only for those employees who receive an "Outstanding" rating, who have not received a QSI within the last 52 weeks, and who have not been promoted or reassigned to a different position near the end of the performance cycle. A copy of the justification provided for the "Outstanding" rating will be sufficient documentation for the QSI. QSIs to the 4th and 7th steps of a grade, extend the employee's current within-grade waiting period by one year. For specific questions regarding QSIs, refer to your servicing Human Resources Specialist or to this office.

Since performance awards and QSIs are based upon the annual performance rating, an employee may not be recommended for more than one award in this category. This does not preclude a recommendation for other monetary or non-monetary award categories (such as Extra Effort, Time Off, etc.) during this time period.

Consider giving a Time Off award to an employee in lieu of a performance award or QSI. This option may be appealing to those employees with low leave balances.

A citation must be provided in Block 11 of AD-287-2 for performance awards and QSIs. The following citation is recommended:

"This award is based upon an official performance appraisal rating of (*Fully Successful, Superior, or Outstanding*) for the rating period April 1, 2003 through March 31, 2004."

Documentation to HRD

Please follow these instructions carefully. The appraisal packages and awards packages are to be forwarded to two different places. Failure to follow these instructions could result in lost forms.

Appraisals:

Each appraisal package should contain the following and be stapled together in the following order:

- 1) Original AD-435P
- 2) Written justification for *Outstanding* and *Unacceptable* rating, if applicable
- 3) Performance Plan Cover Sheet, if used
- 4) AD-435A/B or Performance Plan

All appraisal packages must be sent to:

Theresa Bailey
Performance and Awards Staff
Human Resources Division
5601 Sunnyside Avenue, Room 3-1148B
Beltsville, Maryland, 20705-5107

Awards:

Each award or QSI package should contain the following and be stapled together in the following order:

- 1) Original AD-287-2
- 2) Copy of AD-435P
- 3) Written justification as appropriate

For AFM employees, award packages must be sent to:

Suzanne Sucheki
Performance and Awards Staff
Human Resources Division
5601 Sunnyside Avenue, Room 3-1170D
Beltsville, Maryland, 20705-5107

For all other ARS employees, award packages must be sent to the appropriate Human Resources Clerk in the Human Resources Division.

Due Dates

All appraisals and awards should be received in HRD **no later than June 4, 2004**. **Supervisors should consult applicable union agreements and comply with any time frames for the submission of performance appraisals and awards for bargaining unit employees.**

Other Reminders

Performance plans for performance cycle beginning April 1, 2004, should be established and communicated to employees.

Performance plans should be in place for those employees whose performance cycle ends December 31, 2004.

It is strongly suggested that supervisors use *Enclosure 1*, "Checklist for Preparing Performance Plans" when establishing new performance plans for their employees. This checklist serves as a tool to ensure that performance elements and standards set for employees are done so in accordance with performance management policy.

At least one progress review should be completed and documented on the AD-435A, during the performance cycle.

Contacts

Questions regarding performance appraisal and award policy may be referred to Theresa Bailey on 301-504-1452, or Mary Oxner on 301-504-1368. Rating officials should refer any performance problems which may result in a "less than fully successful" rating, to their servicing Employee Relations Specialist.

Enclosure

cc:

Area Director's Secretaries
AAO's Secretaries
AFM Secretaries
All HRD Employees

CHECKLIST FOR PREPARING PERFORMANCE PLANS

Performance plans should be developed for each employee within 30 calendar days of the beginning of the appraisal period. It is important to note that an employee who receives an unacceptable rating should not be placed under new performance standards until they receive an opportunity to improve their current performance. Supervisors must contact their servicing Employee Relations Specialist for immediate assistance. The following are reminders for establishing a performance plan.

1. Check the employee's position description for accuracy; the major duties in the position description should be included in the performance plan as critical elements. Accomplishment of organizational objectives and goals can be included in performance plans.
2. Employee participation in developing the plan is desirable. However, the rating and reviewing officials have the final responsibility for establishing the performance plan.
3. There must be at least three, but not more than ten elements.
4. At least one element must be critical; at least one element must be noncritical.
5. Standards should be accurate, objective, measurable, attainable, and understandable.
6. Each employee whose position is classified as a "supervisor" must have a separate critical element that addresses Equal Opportunity/Civil Rights (EO/CR). Incorporated into one of the other critical elements, must be performance objectives that address supervisory responsibility. (Positions classified as supervisor usually include Supervisory, Supervisor, Manager, Officer, or Administrator in the title.)
7. All performance plans for non-supervisory employees must include (in at least one of the critical elements) the responsibility for demonstrating a commitment to EO/CR. Remember, non-supervisory employees may include individuals who have limited supervisory responsibilities (such as those of a team leader, or those that supervise one technician, clerical employee, or student, etc.).
8. All employees with health, safety, environmental protection, and/or energy management responsibilities should have an element and standard in their performance plan that addresses these responsibilities.
9. The performance plan must be signed by the employee, supervisor, and reviewing official (normally, the second-line supervisor). The employee should then receive a copy of the approved plan.

In addition:

There must be at least one documented mid-year or progress review during the appraisal period. The performance plan should be initialed and dated by the supervisor and the employee. This shows that such a review took place.

If deficiencies are noted in an employee's performance at any time during the rating period, supervisors should contact their servicing Employee Relations Specialist to discuss the appropriate procedures to handle such circumstances.